

VZCZCXRO5429
RR RUEHIK
DE RUEHSI #0199/01 0480841
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 170841Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2874
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000199

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SENATORS MCCAIN, THUNE AND BARRASSO INVESTIGATE
SECURITY SITUATION IN GEORGIA

TBILISI 00000199 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) Summary: Senators John McCain (R-AZ), John Thune (R-SD) and John Barrasso (R-WY) met January 10-11 in the Black Sea resort city of Batumi with President Saakashvili and other members of the GoG as well as opposition representatives. They also traveled to Zugdidi near the administrative boundary line with Abkhazia to meet with EUMM representatives and a group of IDPs. During the visit, Senator McCain was awarded the honor of National Hero, the first time a non-Georgian has received such an honor. End Summary.

Codel Visits Batumi

2. (SBU) Senators McCain, Thune, and Barrasso met with President Saakashvili on arrival during their visit on January 10-11. In their several meetings, President Saakashvili stressed his concern about Georgia's security situation as a result of Russian occupation of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He highlighted the tremendous economic progress that Georgia was making in building up the Black Sea resort city of Batumi, contrasting it favorably with the difficulties that Russia was having in developing Sochi prior to the 2014 Olympic Games. Senator McCain shared President Saakashvili's doubts that Russia intended to comply with its obligations under the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement. Senator McCain thanked the President for Georgia's decision to send troops to Afghanistan and reiterated that Georgia enjoyed bi-partisan support on the issue of its territorial integrity.

3. (SBU) On January 11, Senator McCain was presented the award of National Hero by President Saakashvili for Senator McCain's longtime support of Georgia's democratic aspirations. Following the ceremony, the delegation had lunch with President Saakashvili, Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria, Deputy Minister of Interior Eka Zguladze, National Security Council Secretary Eka Tkeshelashvili, and a number of other GoG officials.

Opposition Meeting

4. (SBU) The delegation met with Giorgi Targamadze (Christian Democratic Movement), Levan Gachechiladze (Protect Georgia Movement), and David Usupashvili (Republicans/Alliance for Georgia) to discuss opposition views of current events. All three expressed their support for Georgia's deployment to Afghanistan, as well as their concern about the current security situation and Russian intentions towards Georgia in general. Targamadze and Usupashvili questioned President Saakashvili's rhetoric toward Russia and whether it has served to raise tensions. Targamadze and Usupashvili highlighted the lack of development of democratic institutions and a difficult media environment for the opposition. All three opposition leaders said that upcoming local elections would be a significant signal as to how willing the GoG was to hold free elections and develop democratic society and institutions.

IDP meeting in Zugdidi

5. (SBU) A group of 18 IDPs from Sukhumi, Ochamchire and Gali

districts of Abkhazia met with the delegation in Zugdidi. The group consisted of people from a variety of occupations and included five ethnic Abkhaz who came to Zugdidi after the August 2008 conflict. Two of the ethnic Abkhaz who took the floor to speak on behalf of their families and other Abkhaz who crossed the boundary, expressed concern with what they called "the Russian occupation" of Abkhazia. They accused Russian forces of imposing Russian citizenship on the population, exploiting Abkhaz natural resources, barring international humanitarian and human rights organizations and election observers from entering Abkhazia. "The Kremlin is trying to repeat the Mukhajirstvo (practice of expelling Abkhazs into the Ottoman Empire during Russia's Caucasus war in 1864), and we are appealing to the West to prevent it," said one Abkhaz IDP. An ethnic Georgian IDP stressed that the Russian forces are artificially dividing the two peoples, "standing between them like a wall."

EUMM briefing

¶6. (SBU) The delegation met with EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) head Ambassador Hans-joerg Haber and other staff members at the EUMM Zugdidi Field Office. Haber briefed the delegation on the nature of its mandate and organization of the Mission, including EUMM's achievements and challenges. EUMM staff members provided the delegation with information on security incidents that have occurred along the administrative boundary line and ongoing human rights issues. EUMM also gave an assessment of Georgian and Russian compliance with the ceasefire agreements, noting its view that the Georgians exercise restraint near the boundaries, but Russia remains non-compliant with the ceasefire agreements by maintaining troops, FSB Border Guard units, and heavy military equipment in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¶7. (U) Senator McCain's office did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

TBILISI 00000199 002.2 OF 002

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